



Setting Boundaries in Anxious Congregational Settings
Part 2: The Congregation
Conversation Guide

Facilitator's Notes

This conversation guide is meant to help make the instruction led by Dr. David Olsen applicable and helpful for your ministry context. This training can be completed as one 3-hour session or divided into 2 sessions of 75-90 minutes.

Video run time: 70:00 min. This is a series of two 90-minute training sessions or they can be combined for a 3-hour training session for church leaders. Great for use with lay leadership and paid and unpaid church staff. This series is designed to help expand the circle of accountability around clergy professional boundaries and the establishment of healthy practices in local churches.

Part 2: The Congregation

This session spells out the issues around self-identity and setting boundaries in anxious systems. The video will encourage and equip the establishment of healthy boundaries for the roles of clergy professional, ministerial professionals and lay leaders.

*Instructions: Play Part 2: The Congregation. At the end, invite the group to think about the following questions. Before discussion, you might revisit your covenant around confidentiality. Consider sharing the sections on confidential and limited access information from *Healthy Disclosure: Solving Communication Quandaries in Congregations* by Kibbie Simmons Ruth, Karen A. McClintock. In anxious congregations, the necessary trust may not exist to foster vulnerability. With this in mind, some of the questions may need to be rhetorical. A goal of this work is to foster the creation of healthy boundaries for the building of connection and covenantal trust.*

1. Create a bar graph showing the level of anxiety in each of your overlapping relational systems. If 0 is no anxiety and 10 is so anxious you are in a state of constant hyper-vigilance, how anxious is your current family? Your congregation? Your family of origin? You? Identify other systems that are significant to you, and add a bar graph for each.
2. Identify the sources of anxiety in each of these systems. Where do you see interaction effects (that is, where does the anxiety in one system cause anxiety to ratchet up in another system)?
3. What challenges are on the horizon for you on a vertical level (roles, triangles, anxiety passed down to you from earlier generations) and on a horizontal level (from your role in your family of origin)?
4. What is your leadership style when you are under acute stress? Is your leadership style different when the stress becomes chronic?

Boundaries

Ethics training for appointed clergy and laity

5. How do you know when you are becoming reactive during anxiety? Where in your body do you feel it?
6. What are methods that help you move from being reactive to non-reactive?
7. Do you consider our church an open or closed system? Why? If closed how do we create structures for creativity, health and excellence?
8. How have you been able to counteract triangulation, scapegoating and cut-offs?

Take Action:

Take time to establish some protocols and policies based on your conversation. Consider inviting a working group to spend some time working on this in greater detail before your next meeting.

- Take some time to create a ground rules chart for healthy conversations during meetings. This may include rules such as reflecting back what others say and striving to be non-defensive.
- Create steps for deescalating tense meetings. Examples include: taking a moment to breath, prayer such as centering prayer, naming the anxiety and fear.
- Talk about how to prevent triangulation, scapegoating and cut-offs.

Visit www.moumethodist.org/boundaryresources for additional resources for group and individual study.

About the Video Host

David Olsen, PhD is an ordained American Baptist minister and the current executive director of the Samaritan Counseling Center of the Capital Region and adjunct faculty member of the Sage Graduate School. Together with Dr. Nancy D. Devor of the Danielsen Institute in Boston, he has co-authored *Saying No to Say Yes: Everyday Boundaries and Pastoral Excellence*. He often consults with congregations and clergy around the integration of spirituality and psychotherapy.

More Boundaries Resources

- *Saying No to Say Yes: Everyday Boundaries and Pastoral Excellence* by David Olsen and Nancy G. Devor
- *Healthy Disclosure: Solving Communication Quandaries in Congregations* by Kibbie Simmons Ruth (Author), Karen A. McClintock
- *Sex in the Parish* by Karen Lebacqz and Ronald Barton
- *Caring Enough to Confront: How to Understand and Express Your Deepest Feelings Toward Others* by David Augsburg
- *Rising Strong* by Brené Brown
- *Healthy Churches, Faithful Pastors: Covenant Expectations for Thriving Together* by David Keck